Session Name and Time: Shifting a Small Agency's Mission to Embody Customer Service

Featured Speaker: Audrey Borja, Food and Drug Administration and Karen Brown of the Small Business Administration Ombudsman of EPA Headquarters.

Presentation Summary: It is a matter of attitude. This is a challenge for a regulatory agency. EPA and FDA are cousins working together. FDA has 9200 employees, 6000 in Headquarters and 3,200 in the field. FDA tried to follow the President's directions in his Executive Order about Customer Service on September 11, l993, and then follow-up memos for improving customer service on March 22, l995, and March 3, l998. FDA is concerned with the safety of products. FDA's customers are "those who use or are directly affected by FDA's products and services. It is a customer/provider relationship with (1) volunteer customers, (2) entitled customers, (3) compelled customers (people who are inspected – these people give FDA trouble). In following the '93 Presidential E.O., FDA must be fair, equitable, willing to listen, open to a working relationship and willing to solve problems. When they published their customer service standards they came up with Process Attributes and Quality Attributes.
Process attributes included consistency in policies, and the quality attributes included flexibility, courtesy, listen and timeliness. This requires a cultural change in FDA to look at the soft side of things which is difficult. It is like going uphill. Then GPRA came along in l993, requiring strategic plans, performance plans, annual plans and all having a customer service element. It said you will do performance goals with all three. Teams were formed and public affairs worked with them to achieve the goal of customer service. The General Counsel and mid-level management were difficult to work with. Must be careful with the legal side.

Convinced major centers to participate in a survey which cost $100,000. The survey went out to consumers, other agencies etc. Received responses and feedback and then started to implement the programs. Teams for Reinvention needed to be reorganized.

In 1993 when GPRA came out they implemented Compliance Achievement Reporting System (CARS) for inspections. The result was fewer seizures (HAMMER awards). There was an electronic data base. Inspectors were resistant. Published positive statements. A few came along and then it caught on. 80% in between – must show value to get results. Can not hit people in the head. It was put in their performance appraisals and the field personnel got the message that seizure was not important.

Most recently balancing these measures. Business results drive budget and customer element and satisfied employees. Customer service is required to get performance goals met. Got over 50 Hammer Awards, represents partnership with businesses. For example, FDA inspectors, labs, and business have workshops to open up communication. Industry pre-announce inspections, give report after inspection is done and go over the key points after the inspection. Started getting compliant firms and no seizures necessary. Expanding the program to drug, medical etc. It was a great pilot. Awards and incentives were given for excellent customer service. Standards are important; have people look at them and raise their awareness level. Publish them on the Internet.

Important Ideas from the Discussion: FDA never told the agency there was a problem, just told them there was a needed cultural change. International harmonization was going on. Doug Krug worked with the Agencies in a graceful was without devaluing them. Must deal with low morale and internal customers. If there is employee satisfaction, then there is customer satisfaction.

Key Questions of the Speaker:
How did you set your performance standards? How do you deal with the scientist in the field who doesn't want to have anything to do with customer service?
Answer: The problem EPA has is there is no common database for the different media – air, water — everyone does it differently. How do you get a common framework?

How can EPA use this information?
Since EPA is a small agency too, with diverse customers, we can follow the examples of FDA.

Where in EPA can this information be used?
The information can be used with inspectors and field personnel.

Any commitments to follow-up action at EPA: None

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